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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/16): Palestinian press report  
on US officials' visits to the region this week

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Main Stories:  
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Al-Hayat Al-Jadida and Al-Ayyam run front page stories on US  
officials' visit to the region this week. The two dailies quote  
Secretary Clinton in their headlines saying that she hopes that  
serious peace negotiations will resume. Headlines also highlight  
Vice President Biden's visit to the region in March.

The dailies highlight Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud  
Abbas chairing the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday. The cabinet  
approved a law that bans settlement goods in the PA-controlled  
cities. Reports quote Abbas saying that the PA is waiting for the US  
response on PA suggestions to resume negotiations. Al-Ayyam  
highlights the Ministers' vote to alter the penal code on "family  
honor killings", upgrading the crime to murder.

The dailies highlight reports from the group Peace Now that claim  
construction in the West Bank settlements continues despite the  
temporary freeze. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that construction  
continues in 25 percent of all settlements, while Al-Ayyam reports  
that it continues in 34 settlements. Al-Quds highlights an "intense  
rivalry between wings in the Jerusalem Municipality and the extreme  
right to demolish the largest possible number of houses in  
Jerusalem."

The three dailies highlight news that the Dubai police accused 11  
Europeans of being involved in the assassination of Hamas leader  
Mahmoud al-Mabhouh last month in Dubai. Reports note that Fatah and  
Hamas are exchanging blame for the murder.

Sunday, February 14

The dailies front page stories on Ahmad Rwaidy, head of Jerusalem Unit within the Office of the Palestinian President, stressing the seriousness of pending legal cases against demolishing multi-story residential buildings in Jerusalem that the municipality is increasingly targeting. Rwaidy added "we are aware of the current Israeli campaign against the Palestinian presence in the city. We are consistently and relentlessly addressing this issue with the owners of houses and buildings, providing them with legal and engineering support and consultation." Hatem Abdel Qader, the Fatah official responsible for Jerusalem, told Al-Quds that the Israeli Minister of Interior continues to obstruct six structural plans for Jerusalem which the various Municipality committees have already approved. "The continued obstruction of these plans puts hundreds of residential units in various neighborhoods in Jerusalem under risk of demolition" added Abdel Qader.

Al-Quds and Al-Ayyam run front page stories on a number of merchants and shop owners at the entrance of the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem saying that they received notices from the Municipality markets' inspectors last Wednesday ordering them to evict the shops by today. The Municipality decision came following reports about their intention to seal off the Damascus Gate for two years starting next April under the pretext of renovating the infrastructure inside the Old City. Reports note that this could lead to the closing of more than 400 shops, thus exerting indirect pressures on the residents and merchants to leave the Old City.

The three dailies also front page stories on Egypt informing the Palestinian factions in Gaza that all of their comments on the

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reconciliation plan will be taken into consideration at the time of implementation. Reports note that the factions are searching for creative solutions to overcome the question of signing the plan without undermining the positions of the political factions, particularly those of Hamas and Fatah. Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit stressed that Egypt did not change the reconciliation plan and that the current document reflects accurately what was agreed upon. Gheit added, "Egypt offered Hamas a lot and convinced the other factions to accept several of Hamas' demands, particularly in terms of the election system."

Saturday, February 13

The three dailies run front page stories on a series of visits by senior US officials this week to help restart the peace process and mobilize support for US policies towards Iran. Reports note that Secretary Clinton will meet Sunday in Doha with Prince Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani and Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani. Clinton will also meet on Monday in Riyadh with Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud Al-Faisal. Reports quote State Department Spokesman Phillip Crowley saying that Iran will be the most prominent topic in Clinton's discussions in Doha and Riyadh, in addition to efforts for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The dailies also run front page stories on the death of a Palestinian man near Hebron who was shot by Israeli soldiers who claim that he attempted to stab them. Palestinians who were close to the site questioned the Israeli claims about the man's attempt to stab the soldiers. In related news, several Palestinians and foreign peace and solidarity movement activists were injured during the weekly anti-wall protests in several villages in the West Bank. In Jerusalem, dozens of Palestinians, solidarity activists, and Israeli left-wing activists participated in the weekly anti-settlement and anti-house eviction policies in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in the presence of large numbers of Israeli police who sealed off the entrance to the neighbourhood.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1) Hadeeth Al-Quds' Column in Al-Quds daily says under the title "America and the Islamic World...and Contradictory Positions":

"[Secretary] Clinton does not talk about sanctions and threats or even warnings for Israel, but she tries to resume negotiations even if it's indirect despite everything happening, including demolition orders and closures of homes and stores inside and outside the Old City...This is certainly in total contradiction to the promises made by President Obama when he came to office."

2) Adli Sadeq opines in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida under the title "Hillary and the Pyramid of Myths" saying: "Hillary Clinton wasn't shy about expressing what she thinks is a fair position towards the Palestinians, saying that she supports sending humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Everyone who listened to her knows that such sentiments are natural in any situation, even if she said it about a prison because sending humanitarian goods to a prison is natural. Those who make it sound like a privilege or use it as a position to justify an injustice are revealing a hidden bias."

RUBINSTEIN